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WASHINGTON

The Soviet Union has proposed a freeze in offensive nuclear weapons in an effort to "lock in" its edge in missiles over the United States, senior U.S. arms control adviser Paul H. Nitze said today.

In a prepared speech, Nitze called the proposed moratoriums in both long and intermediate-range weapons "discredited" and old.

"The strategy underlying the Soviet approach seems clear," Nitze said. "The Soviet Union is pleased with the current strategic situation. They possess substantial advantages in several key measures of strategic offensive nuclear power, particularly in prompt counterforce capability."

The speech, before the National Press Club, divulged some of the give-and-take in the first round of U.S.-Soviet negotiations in Geneva, Switzerland, which wound up last week.

At the opening of the talks in March, the U.S. and Soviet negotiators adopted a "confidentiality rule" to screen their discussions from the public. According to U.S. officials, it prohibits the negotiators from discussing details of the talks.

But Nitze, who advises President Reagan, is not a member of the U.S. delegation.

In the speech, Nitze said the Soviets' goal is to "abort" Reagan's strategic weapons program and to roll back the scheduled deployment of new U.S. nuclear missiles in Western Europe.

At the same time, he said, the Soviets have proposed a ban on research, testing and deployment of the U.S. anti-missile program known as Star Wars because "the Soviets fear that the West's superior technological base could give us an advantage in the more exotic defensive technologies, and they want to prevent this," Nitze said.

On Tuesday, a senior U.S. official who demanded anonymity blamed the Soviet Union for "no constructive move forward" in negotiations to slow the nuclear arms race.

That official said the Soviets not only had failed to put new proposals on the table in the Geneva talks but "backtracked" on offers they had made in the past.

He said it was possible the talks already had reached an impasse, but that a judgment was being withheld until results of the first round, which wound up last week in the Swiss city, were reviewed.

"There's been no constructive move forward, but it's what I expected," the official said.

He said the Soviets had not threatened a walkout and "were perfectly willing to discuss meetings into the fall." The next round is due to open on May 30.

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Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner offered a different appraisal Tuesday, saying the United States was "in a marvelous position" to reach an agreement in Geneva because the Soviets were eager to put restrictions on Star Wars.

Turner, who served in the Carter administration, told reporters at the Arms Control Association, a private group, that the Soviets would probably make concessions if the United States offered not to deploy a space defense for American land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Reagan began the administration review Tuesday with a meeting at the White House with the three U.S. negotiators, Max Kampelman, John Tower and Maynard Glitman.

Before attending the session, Secretary of State George P. Shultz offered a gloomy appraisal of the Geneva talks. Interviewed on a U.S. Information Agency program, he said "nothing substantively, particularly significant took place" during the six weeks of talks.

The negotiations, which resumed after a 15-month lapse, may simply be "settling down" at this point, Shultz said. But, he said, "at least as I look at it, the Soviet Union has been engaged in a process to see if there are things they can get from us without bargaining..."

Later, a senior U.S. official gave reporters an even more negative account of the status of the negotiations on strategic and intermediate-range nuclear weapons and space-based defense systems.

He said the Soviets apparently were "pleased" with the current strategic balance, which gives them an advantage in offensive nuclear weapons, and also want to retain their edge in European missiles.

The official said the Soviets, counting on opposition in Western Europe to Reagan's futuristic research program, hoped to gain concessions from the U.S. negotiators without making any concessions on offensive weapons.

Challenging an assertion by Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the official said the United States had offered in Geneva to negotiate limitations on deployment of Star Wars systems. But the official said research could not be verified or impeded.

Gorbachev last week accused the Reagan administration of reneging on an agreement to consider the Strategic Defense Initiative in conjunction with offensive weapons.

The senior U.S. official said there were "lots and lots of instances" in which Soviet negotiators had "backtracked" in Geneva from previous positions.

He said they had not reintroduced a proposal to reduce strategic missiles on both sides by at least one-fourth.

EDITOR'S NOTE - Barry Schweid has covered arms control and U.S.-Soviet negotiations for The Associated Press since 1973.